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SECRET

4. (U) NEA - SOVIETS SEND NEW TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN
(GDS 12/19/85)

(S) DURING THE FIRST HALF OF DECEMBER, THE SOVIET UNION DEPLOYED MAJOR ELEMENTS OF AN AIRBORNE REGIMENT TO BAGRAM AIR BASE NORTH OF KABUL. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFGHANISTAN NOW EXCEEDS 5,000, AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT ADDITIONAL TROOPS MAY BE INTRODUCED.

(S) THE MISSION OF THESE NEW FORCES REMAINS UNKNOWN, BUT AT A MINIMUM THEY INCREASE MOSCOW'S CAPABILITY TO SECURE THE BAGRAM-KABUL AREA. OBVIOUSLY THEY COULD ALSO BE USED ELSEWHERE IN AFGHANISTAN AGAINST TRIBAL REBELS.

(S) DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER HAS EXPRESSED TO THE SOVIET CHARGE SERIOUS CONCERN OVER THIS SIGNIFICANT EXPANSION OF THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN. WE ARE CONSULTING WITH A WIDE RANGE OF ALLIES, INTERESTED COUNTRIES IN THE REGION AND KEY NON-ALIGNED SUCH AS YUGOSLAVIA AND ALGERIA, SUGGESTING THAT THEY MAY WISH TO EXPRESS CONCERN DIRECTLY TO THE SOVIETS.

(S) WITHIN AFGHANISTAN, THE INSURGENCY CONTINUES IN MOST OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AND SECURITY ALONG MAJOR ROADS REMAINS PRECARIOUS. THERE HAS BEEN A RECENT RISE IN TERRORIST INCIDENTS IN KABUL ITSELF, AND THE AFGHAN MILITARY CONTINUE TO SUFFER SERIOUS MANPOWER, ORGANIZATIONAL AND MORALE PROBLEMS. WE HAVE BEEN AWARE FOR SOME TIME THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE TAKEN AN INCREASINGLY DIRECT ROLE IN MILITARY COMMAND AND CONTROL FUNCTIONS BUT WE REMAIN UNABLE TO CONFIRM NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT SOVIET PERSONNEL HAVE FLOWN COMBAT MISSIONS FOR THE AFGHAN AIR FORCE OR TAKEN A DIRECT COMBAT ROLE ON THE GROUND.